

# BASIN STREET

## IT'S RISE AND FALL

By ANDRÉ CAJUN

Sketches by ZAMB



NOUVELLE ORLEANS









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BASIN STREET



OLD BASIN STREET  
NEW ORLEANS

ZAMB



BASIN

STREET

BY

ANDRE CAJUN

DRAWINGS BY ZAMB  
(WILEY CHURCHILL)

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### Author's Note

The writer, dear reader, is a folklorist, not a historian and therefore does not pen history. To inscribe the authentic history of Basin Street would require but a few pages. To write a detailed account of what the old folks said would require more than one volume.

The aim herein is not to rattle any more than necessary the bones of New Orleans' Pink Past. Therefore, the reader will note the book is short, snappy and to the point. It is in no way obscene, and penned by one who was thoroughly acquainted with Basin Street in the heyday of the nineteen -twenties.

Throughout the book it will be noted that the term Dear Isle Of Orleans is often used. Roughly, the Isle has an area of six hundred square miles and is bounded by Bayou Manchac on the north, Gulf of Mexico on the south, a chain of three lakes, Maurepas, Pontchartrain, Borgne on the east and the Mississippi River on the west. And was the only land in the Louisiana Purchase lying east of the Mississippi River.

Sincerely yours,

André Cajun.



Carondelet Canal  
Separating  
The 'Crust from  
The Crumb of  
Old New Orleans!

ZAMB





## BASIN STREET GEOGRAPHICALLY

Basin Street is the twelfth street west of the river (Mississippi) or the beginning of the twelve hundred block on Canal Street. Originally Basin Street extended two blocks south of Canal Street and five north. The former was known as Upper Basin Street, the latter Lower Basin Street. Today the upper part is known as Elks Place and is a small park. Our story, however, is centered around Lower Basin Street, extending from Canal Street to what is presently known as St. Louis Street.

On the enclosed map you will note a waterway, a canal dug by slave labor upon the orders of the Spanish Governor Carondelet, in 1793. The canal connected the head of Bayou St. John with the city (French Quarter). The original purpose of the canal was drainage. However, it soon became an important waterway for luggers and schooners plying between the Gulf Coast and the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

Once the canal proved it had commercial value it was widened and deepened. The north bank of the canal was made into an excellent promenade and used in late evening time and on moon-light nights by the Creole ladies and gentlemen of the city. They would stroll up and down the promenade, then called the "Carondelet Walk." They gazed southward, wondered and talked about varied and sundry things including Basin Street.

On the opposite, or south side of the canal was an entirely different scene. Here made fast to the canal bank was all sorts of lake and coastwise craft manned by as motley crowd of men as ever assembled on any body of water. Yes, it indeed was a great contrast separated only by a ribbon of water scarcely a hundred feet wide, with aristocracy on one side and the scum of the earth on the other.

To the visitor this was a most exotic, picturesque, curious scene to be found on any body of water, fresh or salt. In all fairness to the so-called "Scum" from the south side of the canal it was they who anchored the har-

lot to her chosen site—Basin Street. Years later the canal was filled in and where it flowed is now Toulouse Street. Among the old-timers of New Orleans today there is little doubt that if there had not been a canal at this point, Basin Street, as it later came to be, would have faded from the geographical scene shortly after the departure of General Andrew Jackson's soldiers.

Fate, however, decreed otherwise and the old street hung on and bore witness to the sins of men and women for more than a hundred years.

The enclosed map shows the district had an area of twenty-four square blocks. Four of these blocks, numbers 2, 3, 4 and 24 were and still are cemeteries. Block number I was given over to the Negroes for a playground. On the southeast corner of block 23 was located the "District's" principal restaurant. It was in this establishment during the Mexican War, the world's largest sandwich was first made, an oyster loaf, six inches wide and twenty-four long. Boundary of the "District" were Canal Street on the south, North Claiborne Avenue on the west, St. Louis Street on the north and Basin Street on the east. The natives, however, considered the Carondelet Walk the northern boundary, and not St. Louis Street. The railroad tracks noted in the illustration (Basin Street) are those of the Southern Railroad and were placed there in the year 1902. The "District" maintained an average population of some two thousand women of all shades, creeds and races, most of whom were established in Cribbs.

A crib house was a very simple, cheap structure. A single story affair with a partition wall extending its full length. By a yet cheaper partition each half of the building was divided into small rooms with low ceilings and boasting of one door and window, with the floor but one step above the ground. With the exception of the rooms facing the street all other rooms faced the narrow alley that separated one crib house from another.

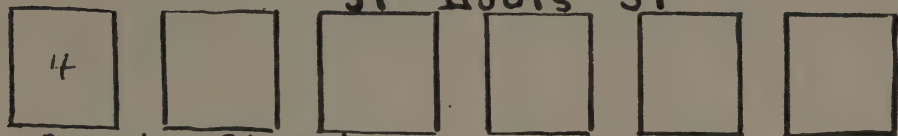
Women who occupied the cribs did not rent them by week or month. They could only be rented for one night and one night only. As most of the crib house owners



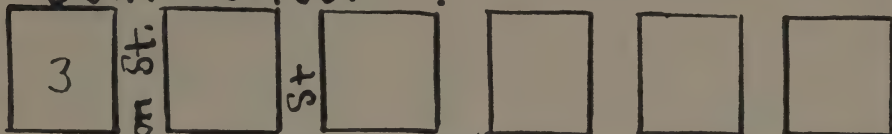
# Carondelet Canal

Levee of Canal

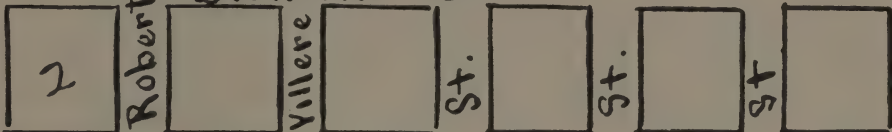
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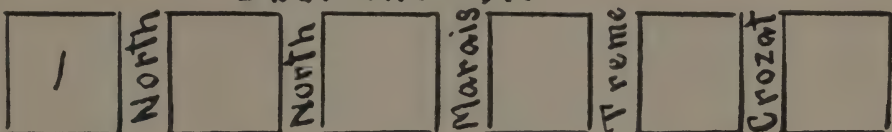
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Bienville St.



Iberville St.



Canal Street

North Claiborne Ave.

Robertson St.

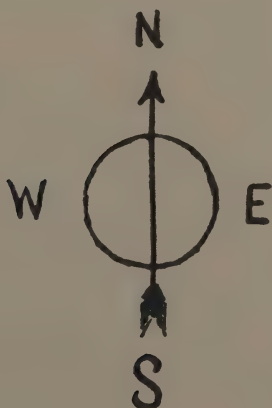
Villere St.

St.

St.

St.

Basin Street



were saloon keepers the harlot each evening went to her landlord's saloon, paid the bartenders the rent and received a key with a number upon it. The number designated the crib she had rented for the night. If she did not return the key by sunrise the following morning, or have a good reason for not doing so she was forever blackballed from the crib houses. Therefore she was very prompt in returning the key.

In contrast to the cribs were the "mansions" decorated with all the frills and fads of that day and each operated by a madame, who adorned herself with expensive jewelry.

Amid this grand, sinful display of wealth these Basin Street mansions were internationally known. But not so of the crib houses. The ungodliness of the mansions made a crib house harlot look like a saint. She "Hustled" for bread to keep body and soul together. But how different with the Basin Street harlot who wine and dined her friends on the best, had a stable of fine horses and carriages, kept her heart-director amply supplied with funds and etc. To see a crib house harlot spend her money, it becomes quite clear to the Christian what the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah meant when he said:

"Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten." Isaiah 23:16.



CRIB HOUSE ZAMB





## BASIN STREET LORE

Early in the fall of the year 1814 word spread up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Valley that General Andrew Jackson and his two thousand mosquito-bitten, dirty-shirt soldiers were on their way to New Orleans to defend that city from an attack by the British. Washington, D.C., it seems, let out the word:

“Unpaid soldiers do not fight as well as those who are paid. And if the British were as strong as General Jackson had reasons to believe, the logical time to pay them would be upon their arrival at New Orleans, including all back pay due them.”

This report coming from Washington spread like sin in the moonlight. To the ears of the prostitutes along the Ohio and Mississippi river ports it was sweet talk. Disposing of all but a few personal possessions, by flatboat, broadhorn, buckboard, buggy, horseback and on foot the prostitutes flocked to New Orleans.

Many of the soldiers and a few of the New Orleans inhabitants gave the harlots a hearty welcome. But the “Crust” of God’s portion of the Dear Isle of New Orleans cast them out. These women of all ages, color and description were a lot hard of hand and heart and did not for a moment hesitate, in the foulest of language to let the “Crust” know that they (the Crust) were purchased property and had no more rights than any one else in the territory comprising the Louisiana Purchase. With the counsel of the soldiers ringing in their ears the harlots eventually came to realize there was nothing to be gained by antagonizing the “Crust”. With the fire of hatred in their hearts and a knife in their garter they quit the French Quarter and moved one block west of the “Quarter’s” western boundary—Rampart Street.

With some soldier help and timber pilfered by river-rats from the waterfront, the harlots, upon short poles erected shacks in the Basin and let it be known they were open and ready for business. Here they remained in business until 1917, when World War One, closed their doors and scattered them all over the city.

The crust of God's portion of the Dear Isle of Orleans . . . particularly the women folk . . . afire with curiosity to know exactly and first-hand what was going on in what they chose to call "Satan's portion of the Dear Isle of Orleans", went first to their chosen house of prayer where they wrestled mightily in invocation for an advance forgiveness for gazing upon such an unholy place. Satisfied their pardon was assured they arose from their prayers and made haste to see for themselves. However, they ventured no further than North Rampart Street (one block east of Basin Street) due most probably to the mud. And there they stood, in wild-eyed astonishment gazing upon the nation's first nudist colony. With curiosity satisfied to capacity they hurried back to their particular sanctuary for another mighty bout with prayer, forgetting the biblical passage—Hosea 4: 14. Like frightened sheep these fair ladies pleaded with the menfolk to rid the city of such an unholy, vile, unhallowed place. The Louisiana Purchase, however, stayed the hand of the "Menfolk", leaving them helpless and Basin Street firmly established itself as a harlot's haven.

It was not until the coming of the steamboat and the immense increase in river trade—also an increase of harlots—that the prostitutes were able to do anything about the sanitary conditions under which they were forced to live.

Living in constant fear of the ladies who prayed against them and the black people who dwelled in the great swamp to the west of them, the harlots huddled in a knot forever planning ways and means to better their lot. The coming of the steamboat was the answer to their sad plight. The river craft with its rich cargo indirectly furnished the financial support the harlot needed to better their conditions.

The river element brought finance but not the expected political power and Basin Street in no time became an uncontrollable, murderous thoroughfare. Life became so cheap along this boulevard of lust, many of the harlots in fear of a knife thrust between the shoulders summoned what remaining courage they possessed and muscled in on







the Irish Channel, a new forming annex to God's portion of the Dear Ise of Orleans. This new addition to the city paralleled the Mississippi River two blocks west and extended from Canal Street to Louisiana Avenue. And there for forty years they fought to maintain their chosen place in the sun. When the day of their moving arrived they departed like they came, over night. The more peaceful of them returned to Basin Street, where the law in the past years had eliminated the river's flatboat men and their ungodly customs.

The wild, riotous element moved to what is presently known as Gallatin Street and in a few years this once peaceful thoroughfare became known as a "Street of a Thousand Murders". Here also was coined the old adage:

"If you can't dance and won't fight, stand on the side and help drag out the disabled".

However, if one displayed any sign he might fight, you would hear someone shout:

"Drop your pistol, pull out your knife and fight fair".

Incidentally it was not Basin, but Gallatin Street that made New Orleans known as "A fertile field for those who had wild oats to sow".

On this thoroughfare of dilapidated sepulchres of human vice, nothing was considered a sin unless it interfered with Gallatin Street. But what a great difference on Basin Street. The likes, or anything pertaining to the like of Gallatin Street was not tolerated and everything was hunk-a-dory along Basin Street. The "Broads" blossomed out, purchased swell horses and hacks for the "Heart directors", hired professional instructors to teach them how to converse and act in the presence of gentlemen. They wine and dined their friends and patrons in the most befitting style. All in all, Basin Street became a harlot's paradise.

Yes, it was recess time for the "Ol' District", with no dark clouds upon the horizon.



God's portion of the "Dear Isle of Orleans" was also enjoying deep, sweet day dreams. Steam and sailing vessels lined her waterfront two and three deep. Vaults of her banks was overflowing with gold. The Basin Street "Broads" wore silk and satin. Their heart directors hauled the gay dashing "Blades" to the boudy houses at night and their long-green to the banks in the morning. Yes, Ol' Basin Street had just about reached its zenith. And then, the black cloud that always hovers in the offing without sign or warning burst.

Gold! One of the three things man sound of mind will give his all for, was heard on every New Orleans street corner and alley. Gold! Gold had been discovered in California and the mad rush to the west coast was on, and within six months New Orleans became a ghost city. Just about everything of importance but the river, left the old town for the land of new found gold.

What recently had been prosperous business houses now stood bare and vacant, like a leopard's spots, one alongside the other, block after block. The harlots followed the gold seekers and the money boys quit coming to the old town to seek new clothes, the nation's finest foods and a change of love. And in no time Ol' Basin Street had all the appearances of an open vault in one of the city's old cemeteries. From the lack of this regular, rich financial gravy the city's money platter became bare as a Scotchman's knee.

Satan, is the product of the hand of God and therefore entitled to a certain portion of the earth and some of its inhabitants—those who deny God. Hence Satan to some extent had a just claim against Basin Street. Although the California gold rush made Basin Street's breath come like that of an asthmatic, with Satan's help she was able to keep her head above water. The emblem of prostitution (a red apple with one bite missing on a white background) flew full mast on its truncheon of sin, proud as any emblem man ever unfurled to God's pure breeze. To cap another bad climax New Orleans had no faith in the new contraption called "The Iron Horse".



CREOLE LADIES DISCUSS  
BASIN STREET EVILS

ZAMB





As early as 1842 the eastern seaboard cities were connected with many miles of railroad. New Orleans did not have one single mile connecting it with anything. Placing her faith in water transportation she forever lost the opportunity of becoming America's greatest seaport.

What a contrast! Out in California the world's greatest boom was in full sway. The early birds struck it rich and the harlots struck the early birds with the holy bonds of matrimony, settled down, wiped the past from their minds and forgot everything but California.

By 1858 another wild, black cloud began to slowly engulf the nation. War! Civil War! The hardest of all wars upon prostitutes broke in 1861 with all the hatred civilized man is capable of, lifting New Orleans from the pit of despair to the soaring heights of a new love. Money! Tap root to the tree of sin again came to her, and her ghastly, ghost-like appearance faded.

Red lights again became prominent along Basin Street. So-called modern cabarets came into existence. Entertainment for soldiers—a place where these tired, weary, lonesome men relaxed and forgot the battlefield, cotton patch and the old folks back home.

Cabarets! New Orleans once thought the hell-holes of Gallatin Street were about as fetid as man could make them, but the places of business the Civil War brought to Basin Street made Gallatin look like a church picnic.

White slavery; Captain, do you need a crew? Dope, smuggling, counterfeiting, kidnapping, blackmail, phony certificates for this, that, or the other were but few of the nefarious types of business the war fetched to Basin Street. Yes, these were the real hell-holes of New Orleans if ever such existed.

And they remained in business throughout the war and the period immediately following—Reconstruction Days.

Bacchus, the patron saint of the cabaret, served his followers well. His stock in trade, gambling, strong drink, narcotics, diseased women, almost ruined the health of

the entire city. And all sold for fabulous prices to the accompaniment of music drawn from home-made instruments.

One of the first cabarets of importance among this group was the "Union". For many years in front of this house, upon a beer keg sat an old Negro man called "Blister Breeches". On a home-made drum with shank bones for drum sticks he pounded out popular tunes of the day. When business was bad he forsook cheerful melodies for a doleful African chant — a tune the "Street" did not like to hear. For by it the women of the "District" knew there was no business on Basin Street. When asked:

"What is the tune"? The old darky would smile and reply:

"Dat boss, am de Basin Street Blues".

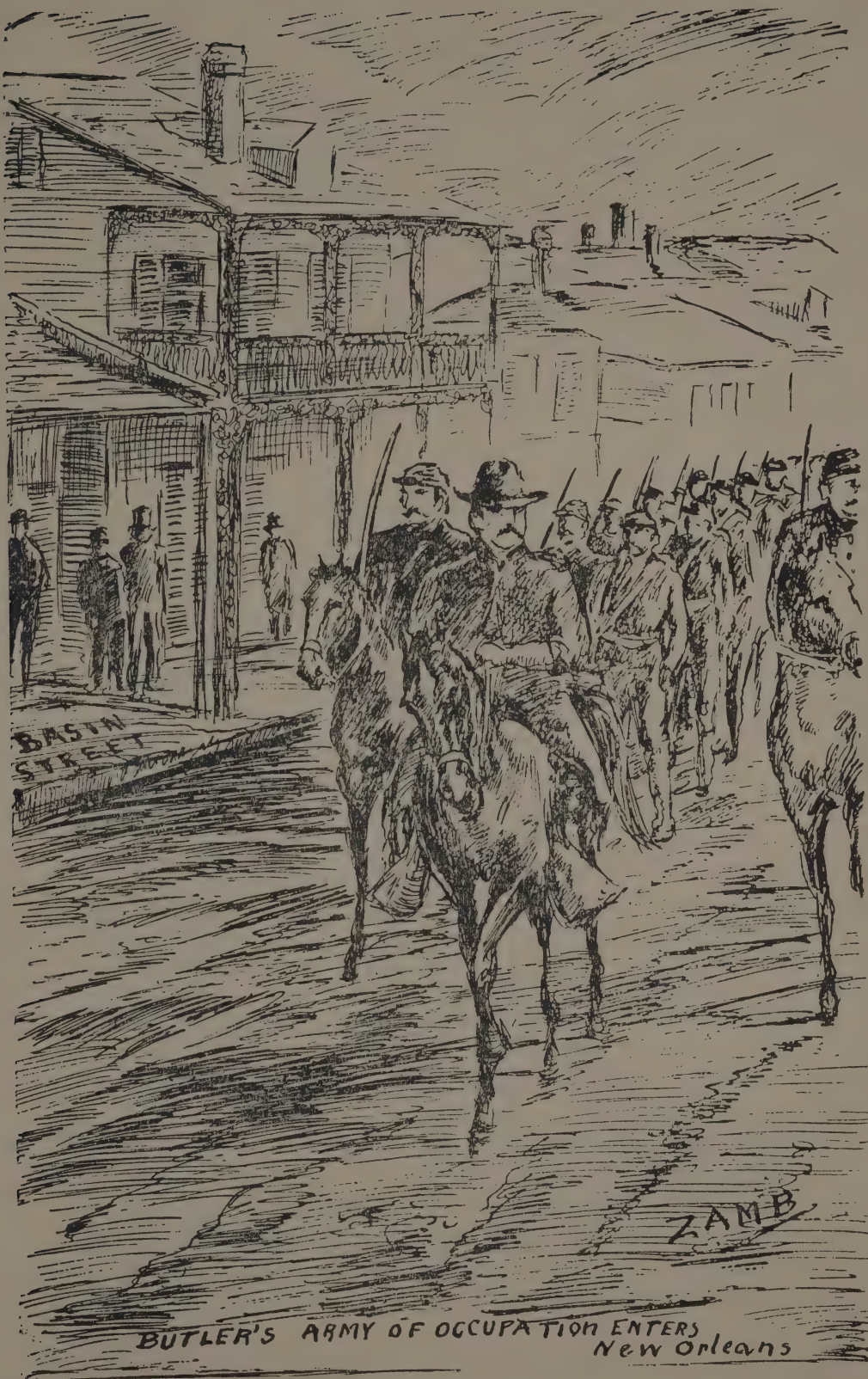
The words Basin Street later gave to this gruesome chant is given elsewhere. It is from this incident that Basin Street became the birth place of the "Blues songs".

During the war men and money were plentiful on Basin Street. Women, however, were scarce. So great was the shortage of femininity that a "Yaller gal" above the age of puberty fetched five hundred dollars or more, a white girl, fair of form and voice, a thousand or more.

From 1860 to 1862 were New Orleans' two richest harvest years. For the old city, school was out and her god Satan, served her well. But dark, black clouds again hovered near and like a flash of storm lightning broke, destroying one of the city's four pillars of support—a fertile field for those who had wild oats to sow.

General Ben Butler took New Orleans; the harlots took to parts unknown, bankers took the curtain and many of God's portion of the "Dear Isle of Orleans" took to the federal soldiers' garbage cans for daily substance.

When informed of the harlots' departure, General Butler flew into an uncontrollable rage. It was while the fever of missing women was making his blood boil, that



BUTLER'S ARMY OF OCCUPATION ENTERS  
New Orleans





he issued an order which decreed the harlot, particularly the "yaller gals", the city's elite. The women who had fled, hearing this returned and to the end of the war took most of the Union soldier's pay.

General Robert E. Lee passed his sword, General Grant got drunk and peace once more returned to the land. This peace, however, was not for New Orleans. She was invaded by a gang of Washington, D.C. Carpetbaggers (Fancy boys) who with their unlimited power went completely off their rockers—robbed the government like the barrel-house queen, Ada Hayes' pet coon robbed her patrons.

Some of the local boys, descendants of the upper crust, saw their "'yaller gals" being led astray, borrowed the regalia of the Ku Klux Klan, started a free-for-all fight and ran the "Fancy boys" out of town.

It was about this time in Washington, D.C., that Senator Summers set up the cry:

"Let's break up those large Southern plantations where some men live like Sultans with a harem, and give to each Southern Negro, forty acres of land and a mule. This statement from the Senator brought the Negroes to New Orleans, like chickens to a sack of leaking corn.

Among those who came to enjoy this blessing from the white father at Washington, was Lulu White and her foster father. Lulu's daddy, like all other Negroes who came for the same purpose, was very much disappointed and returned to his white folks' plantation in Northern Mississippi. Lulu remained and became the consort of a wealthy Mississippi River steamboat gambler who in the two hundred block of Basin Street set Lulu up in business, in a building she made famous as the "House of Mirrors".

In houses of prostitution the law of Louisiana permitted but one woman to the room. Twenty-four rooms gave Lulu twenty-four girls, all octoroons (seven-eighths white, one eighth Negro). Her foster father later became her butler and he, black as an Egypt night, arrayed in white looked like a fly in a bottle of milk. As one entered the main door of Lulu's place of business they were greeted

by this old darky who possessed one of Basin Street's best smiles. A smile he never failed to use when he met someone at the door and asked:

"May I see the soles on your shoes, Sir"?

He would stoop and examine the heels and soles of your shoes. If not in excellent condition you did not enter. To gain entrance to Lulu's place it was necessary that one be well heeled. Floors of the three reception rooms, like the walls were of mirrored glass—hence the name "The House of Mirrors".

The boys in the Klan outfit had no more than cleared the town of the Carpetbaggers when the citizens of the city arose and drove Louisiana's Negro governor, Stewart Pinchback, from office thus ending Negro rule and the Reconstruction Days in the state. The Democrats took over and the city financially went from bad to worse.

The black sheep of heaven, however, was to have all his work undone, particularly in New Orleans, and the old "District" held on.

War again came to the rescue of Basin Street. This time with Spain. The "District" blossomed to entertain the Spanish-American War soldiers, and in doing so became somewhat civic-minded.

The harlots raised a wad of cash and eliminated much of the mud and filth about their homes and streets. The raising of this money, however, proved most unfortunate for the harlots, namely: Whenever the politicians stood in need of cash they put the screws upon the harlots, heart-directors, gamblers, bartender, hack-drivers and pronto the cash was laid on the barrel-head. Up until 1917 this was a favorite source for political revenue.

World War I came. The fight the ladies of God's portion of the Dear Isle of Orleans had started had at last borne good fruit. Some, however, said it was not the ladies or the church, but the good roads, automobiles on the easy payment plan, the hip-pocket flask and the charitable amateur that put old Basin Street out of business.





Soldiers relax on  
Basin Street

ZAME



This writer is of the opinion it was the long, constant, united effort of both the church and the ladies, coupled with the placing of the right kind of men in public office that eventually led to the downfall of this once infamous thoroughfare—Ol' Basin Street.

May her sins be forgiven for she hath loved much.







A GUARDIAN OF THE LAW GETS HIS DAILY  
GRAFT IN EARLY NEW ORLEANS





## THE BASIN STREET POLICE

From the founding of the city in 1718 until the time of the Louisiana Purchase police duty was the responsibility of the French and Spanish military. Under either of the above the military had little or no trouble in enforcing law and order.

December 4th, 1803 the Spanish flag was lowered over Louisiana and the French flag took its place. Twenty days later the French flag came down and the American flag was hoisted in its place. Then all hell broke loose for French and Spanish military were without jurisdiction. Their power had passed to the Americans with the "Purchase", including that of police duty, and that "duty" immediately became a thing of the past.

In Washington, D. C., President Thomas Jefferson was telling Andrew Jackson that he (Jackson) was too damn ignorant to be governor of Louisiana. His appearance, culture and reasoning were of the backwoods variety and would be completely and totally out of place among Louisiana's French and Spanish aristocracy. Yes, said President Jefferson, Jackson was just too damn ignorant to govern anything. Incidentally it was this incident that filled Jackson's heart with hatred for the New Orleans aristocrat and also the reason he so quickly placed the city under martial law.

Meanwhile, in Washington, Brother Jefferson had no idea of the problem the "Purchase" had placed in his lap. Jackson was the only man ever to ask for the job and he had turned him down. At the rejection of Jackson the "problem" began to unfurl. From Virginia to Maine, every man who had a barrel of money and some in a sack, Jefferson asked to take the governorship of Louisiana. All refused, not in the same words but with the same meaning:

"What! Go and live in that mudflat village of the lower Mississippi River, a land alive with snakes, alligators, mosquitos and ridden with fever."

Jefferson, in disgust eventually gave up the idea of having a man with a barrel of money and settled for one who had but little in a sack — William C. C. Claiborne. This august gentleman was appointed to the governorship and he arrived in New Orleans with plenty federal authority but little federal cash.

One of the first things the natives told Governor Claiborne was that the city was without police power and something must be done immediately. Governor Claiborne engaged from head to foot with federal duties had little time to organize a police department. He called a meeting of the prominent citizens and asked them to recommend someone who could organize and supervise a police squad. They did and the governor appointed the man they chose to fulfill the above requirements. To gain the favor of some of President Thomas Jefferson's appointed officials the newly appointed Chief of police placed whites, free blacks and mongrels on the "Force". If there ever was a body of police officers rotten to the core this was such a body. Conditions in the police department became so bad the citizens brought it to the attention of Governor Claiborne. The Governor told the people it was strictly a local affair and the duty of the Mayor to straighten out such matters. However, if the Mayor refused to act, he would. The Mayor did a little buck-passing, the citizens quieted down but the police department became little or no better.

April 1812 Louisiana was admitted into the Union. This great event had no real effect upon the New Orleans' hoodlum police force. The force continued as of old. Namely, to rob, swindle, blackmail, rape and murder. Such was the police force of New Orleans when General Andrew Jackson arrived in the city to protect it from the British.

Jackson cast an evil eye upon this group of police officers and placed the city under martial law, abolished the police and turned their duty over to his soldiers where it remained until he departed.



A SLIGHT CASE OF ABDUCTION ON  
BASIN STREET





Prior to the coming of General Jackson the police force practiced most of the above sins upon a new forming embryo called "Basin Street". They not only kept the "broads" along this canal road in a constant sweat, but took their last hard-earned dollar without the slightest sign of compunction. Hence to the harlots of Basin Street the coming of General Jackson was an answered prayer—if they prayed.

The election in 1816 gave the city a new administration and with it a new police force. This force consisted mostly of Irishmen who worked on a fifty-fifty basis. Half the fines collected by the judge went to the officers making the arrest. It was a nice set-up, but the police were greedy and to reap more they put the screws so hard upon the harlots, the harlots for relief, went to their many political friends and the coppers lost their fifty-fifty deal. The "broads" tightened their purse strings and the Basin Street police were forced to seek a sideline elsewhere.

The next group of men to flatfoot Basin Street were also Irish. Conditions under which these men worked were a bit different. They received a cash payment of twenty-five cents for every day worked, and the right to accept gifts. Then too, they were given uniforms and thereby became New Orleans' first uniformed police.

Their hats were made of a thin brass metal, trousers baggy and the coat so long it almost dragged the ground. This garment, with the exception of the shoulders looked "a mile too big." However, it was not without its good points. From the waist down the coat was one huge pocket. The copper on his last round, day or night stopped at each place of business on his beat and practiced the ancient art of shakedown. By the time the officer was ready to go home his coat pocket bulged with so many gifts he looked like a woman wearing a hoop skirt.

This sort of a police force remained until 1871 when the local Carpetbaggers got their man, Stewart Pinchback, a Negro, appointed to the governor's chair. One of Pinchback's first official acts was to discharge all white police and replace them with Negroes.

The Basin Street Broads thought the Irish, hoop-skirted police gave them a good time, but what the coppers handed out was not a drop in the rain-barrel compared to what Pinchback's Negro police dealt these ladies of the evening.

The black boys in blue not only stole the early morning deliveries of bread and milk, but stripped the clothes lines; chickens fattened in the coop likewise disappeared. They also demanded a portion of their shake-down in trade. It was this last demand that broke the hook that kept the harlots under the police heel. The "Lily white ladies" again went to their political boy friends and a new organization was born. A year later the White Leaguers met the Metropolitan (Negro) police in battle at the foot of Canal Street and in a few hours the New Orleans Negro police department faded into places that ranged from parts unknown to the grave.

The ending of this battle once more placed the whites in command of the state and a new police department was organized, with the emphasis on brains, not brawn. This idea of more brains than brawn was most pleasing to the harlots of Basin Street. However, they were soon to learn that the "idea" was not without its bad features.

When the police department resorted to brains the ex-hoodlum did likewise. They chose a leader and domiciled themselves on Basin Street and went to work on copper, harlot and citizen alike, with murder the limit. Thus giving New Orleans it's first organized crime wave. This hoodlum brain trust lasted until 1881 when the Mafia, or Black Hand Society, working at night with the stiletto took over. For nine years the Mafia held full sway and then came the climax in the form of the broad day-light murder of the then Chief of Police, David Hennessy. With hearts overflowing with fury the citizens a few weeks later took eleven Italians and charged them with this crime, took them from the Parish prison and lynched them.

This broke the Mafia's back in New Orleans and brought about some political changes. The police depart-





Lulu White and her Girls



ment likewise suffered in the change and with the new order came the last hoodlum gang ever to haunt Basin Street, the "Terminal Gang". In 1917 the United States entered World War I and the U. S. Military took over and the Terminal Gang and Basin Street collapsed.

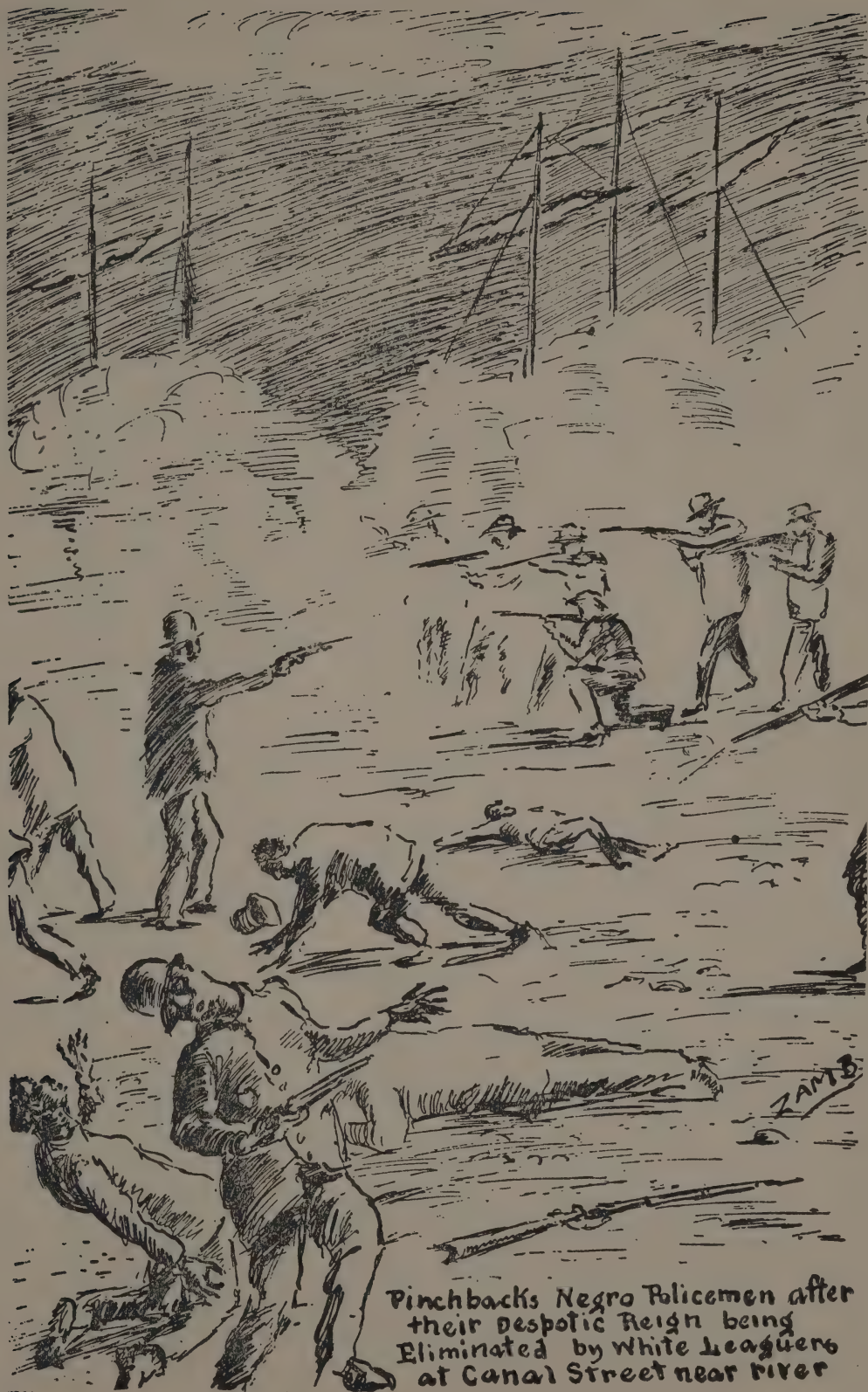
It is interesting to note that out of all the devil's masterpieces mentioned above New Orleans today has one of the nation's outstanding police departments, which goes to verify that the "Sage of the Bayous" has something when he says:

"When a farmer desires to produce fruit that is pleasing to the eye, delicious to the taste, he does not fertilize with sugar or honey, but with one of the foulest of matters—dung. Then the "Great Power" which no man can see, or fully understand, in due time converts the vile dung into sweet fruit."

So dear reader, ends the story of the police that once flatfooted Basin Street.







Pinchbacks Negro Policemen after  
their despotic reign being  
Eliminated by White Leaguers  
at Canal Street near river



## BASIN STREET CHARACTERS

Lives of harlots can be successfully divided into two classes: One with money, the other without. This rule applied to Basin Street as in other parts of the civilized world. To give a detailed account of all New Orleans prostitutes that in some manner, shape or form who have managed to carve their names upon the history of whoredom would require a volume within itself. Therefore the scribe will follow the aim herein, namely: A brief resumé of the last harlots that got their names anchored in New Orleans' "Pink Past".

Emma Johnson was a tall, lean, lanky girl with a sort of reddish hair and a temper forty times hotter than the village blacksmith's forge. Emma operated a brothel she called "The Studio" and had for a motto: "Everything is on the up-and-up". Emma was the type of girl that moved fast and struck hard. When in a good mood she was most pleasant. However, when aroused she was as mean as a wildcat with a sore ear. Her financial affairs were way short of what they should have been, especially in a day when tall, slim women were thought to be the approved type. Knowing full well she was not very popular she kept a bevy of young beautiful girls as her chief source of revenue, and thereby did not do bad for herself. Her place of business was situated at 331 North Basin Street.

Josie Arlington, one of the fairest of women ever to enter the field of harlotry, was short, pleasingly plump, and a mop of bronzed colored hair and a figure any so-called pleasingly plump woman could be proud of. She possessed small feet, hands and ears, with ankles the "Boys" said were completely "out of this world". Her smile it was said, would disarm the Devil. Josie was really popular. On the other hand she lost many a friend by not being "In" when the friend called. However, this had no bad affect upon her financial standing. She lost one friend and gained two others, mostly by making promises she never intended keeping. Yes, Josie was an easy-going girl but would fight like a guinea wasp when

the occasion demanded it. Along Basin Street, Josie was known as a "Cute Trick", a dreamer who lived in the past. The future—well, Josie had no future for she died before she attained the age of thirty-five. Her place of business, known as "The Arlington", was situated at 225 North Basin Street.





A GAY BLADE VISITS THE MANSION LADIES  
OF BASIN STREET



## THE BASIN STREET SIX

New Orleans is and has always been a city that worshipped the arts. Likewise she is one of the world's few cities that has a style of music all her own. Credit for this distinction goes to the black man, not the white. The above story is long, stretching out over many years, much of which is not documented. Given here is one of the many stories of the origin of New Orleans' famous dance band, "The Basin Street Six".

Perfect rhythm in music along the lines of a Negro chant to the local Negro is Jazz. To the French, "Gumbo", meaning mixed up. When the Negro began to accompany his music with song the French called it "Ya-Ya" (a lot of words meaning nothing) and forbade him to sing or play music in public on the grounds that the combination of noise (Jazz) split their ear drums. Hence for twelve years after Abraham Lincoln emancipated the Negro, he was unable to play music or sing in public.

The coming of the Carpetbaggers gave the Negro the answer to his long cherished dream—he could play music and sing whenever and wherever he wished. However, the home-made instruments the Negro used were about as hard on the Carpetbaggers' ears as it was on the French. Badly in need of music for their private dance halls along North Rampart Street, the Carpetbaggers chose six Negroes, raided the federal treasury for the price of a musical instrument for each Negro and hired instructors to teach the black boys how to play them.

The Negroes learned fast and in a very short time became known up and down the Mississippi River as an excellent dance band. Most of these Negro's music was for the Carpetbaggers and their "yaller gals".

When the Carpetbaggers threw a party for their "gals" it was the best party the federal treasury could afford. Everything was the latest—food, drink, silk and satin. The Negro band wore Tuxedos, with all the trimmings high silk toppers, patent leather shoes and were sprayed from head to foot with high-priced imported

French perfume. So went, says early New Orleans, the world's greatest dance band.

Good things like good fruit sooner or later must fall, lest it perish, leaving no memory of it. And so it was with this excellent Negro dance band. Had things continued along in the normal way, The Basin Street Six would have faded from the musical world long before the mould had consumed the caskets in which they were buried.

Fate, it seems, was not going to let them decay without leaving something by which they would be remembered. To make the remembrance vividly outstanding fate dramatized the recollection with black gun powder and hot lead on a sultry afternoon of September 14, 1874. A short, pitched battle was fought between the citizens of the city and the Carpetbaggers' black police force. The former was the victor and the latter disappeared.

With victory going to the whites our black band suffered untold hardships. Without the aid and comfort of the Carpetbaggers the "Band" had no more fried chicken for breakfast. Likewise there was "Nary a soul" to replace the Tuxedoes, high silk toppers and patent leather shoes.

The red silk and satin the "Yaller gals" loved to wear had become such filthy rags no respectful billygoat would consider dining upon them. Which in turn meant, the "Gals" were in no position financially to help the Negro band. However, it was they who made the suggestion that the black band go and play music on Basin Street for handouts from passers-by.

To Basin Street went the badly battered six. In ragged Tuxedoes, crushed, high silk toppers and shoes with their toes protruding, the six Negroes sat each evening on the Basin Street levee where they played and sang for hand-outs. Here they gained the name, "The Basin Street Six."

As these Negroes were known only by their nicknames the writer has never been able to learn their legal ones. As they sat upon the levee or canal bank (Caronde-





THE BIRTH OF  
JAZZ  
ORIGINAL BASIN STREET  
SIX

Te-Jo      Shorty      Big Head  
Alley Boy      Sharpeye



let canal) facing Basin Street, from left to right, they were known as Te-Jo, a tall, slim Negro with huge flat feet, a pleasant smile who played the guitar.

Alley Boy, short and immensely fat. When he bore down on his instrument, the cornet, one thought his clothes would burst at the seams.

Shorty, a little dried-up Negro, with long snaky fingers, played the saxhorn.

Big Head, a medium sized Negro, with a head twice the size of an ordinary man, played the banjo.

Andy, a somewhat tall and skinny Negro, with one foot much larger than the other played the French horn, and Sharpeye, a long fingered, wizened little fellow, beat the snare drum. Due to his squickness of eye, he was given the job of collecting the coins tossed their way. As he never missed one, hence the name "Sharpeye."

As time passed these six Negroes gained more and more attention and likewise the flow of coins improved. Then came the day an eastern caberet owner heard them and saw in their music great possibilities.

Realizing what an asset these Negroes would be to his business he made a contract with them and took them to New York City, where the great music critics for the first time heard the New Orleans style of music called Jazz.

## THE FIRST BLUES SONG

If you ever go to New Orleans

Keep out of all bad scrapes,

Lookout for the Chief, and his police at any rate.

He will chase you like a bloodhound,

And keep on to your trail

Until he locks you in that pig-pen,

Called the Orleans Parish Jail.

He will lock you in your cell at night,

With a little cot thats all

While the bedbugs and the greybacks

Play hooky on the wall.

You will dream of friends and relations,

That have come and gone your bail,

But you will wake up broken hearted

In that Orleans Parish Jail.

The above was penned at a table in the old Union Cabaret by a Mississippi River steamboat captain. Unfortunately this writer was never able to learn the Captain's name. The Captain gave the two verses to the Basin Street Six Band and told them to play it. They did. The lyric, strange to say perfectly harmonized with Blister Breeches African chant—The Basin Street Blues. The Basin Street Six called it "The Song Of The Blues." Later, however, it was reverted back to Blister Breeches' original title.





Old "Blister Breeches"  
giving his "Basin Street Blues."



## OTHER STREETS

The closing of the "District" in the year 1917 scattered that section's inhabitants over the commercial area of the city. Which in turn brought the city another problem—street-walkers. The so-called "Street Walkers" confined their activity to Baronne and Carondelet Streets. Another group made St. Charles Street their beat. Those with sufficient bank account rented or purchased fine homes and converted them into assignation houses thus spoiling the neighborhood in which they were situated. Then there was the crowd with more "Brass" than finance and some political "Pull". It was this gang that barged into the French Quarter and took over the vice angle. Where from 1918 until the bank crashes of the thirties made the "Quarter" undesirable.

In the early life of New Orleans, Royal Street had little or no part in the prostituting of the human body. Her specialty was gambling, and harlots and gambling mixed no better than whiskey and automobile driving. Consequently the gamblers kept their girl friends away from Royal Street, leaving that ancient thoroughfare to a great extent free from that sort of vice, Royal Street from Canal Street to Dumaine Street a distance of nine blocks on either side was lined with houses of chance—salt mines the natives called them.

The last street in the "Quarter" from which the harlots faded was Bourbon. From Canal Street to St. Peter Street, a distance of six blocks, was where the "Rat" sought virginity and the Devil sought them all. Bourbon or "Harlot's Row" boasted of the type of prostitute that stood behind closed shutters, reached out and grabbed one's hat as he passed. Cost of retrieving the hat depended on how hard a bargain one could drive.

Today Bourbon Street is one of the nation's five internationally known skid-rows.

## THE RED LIGHT

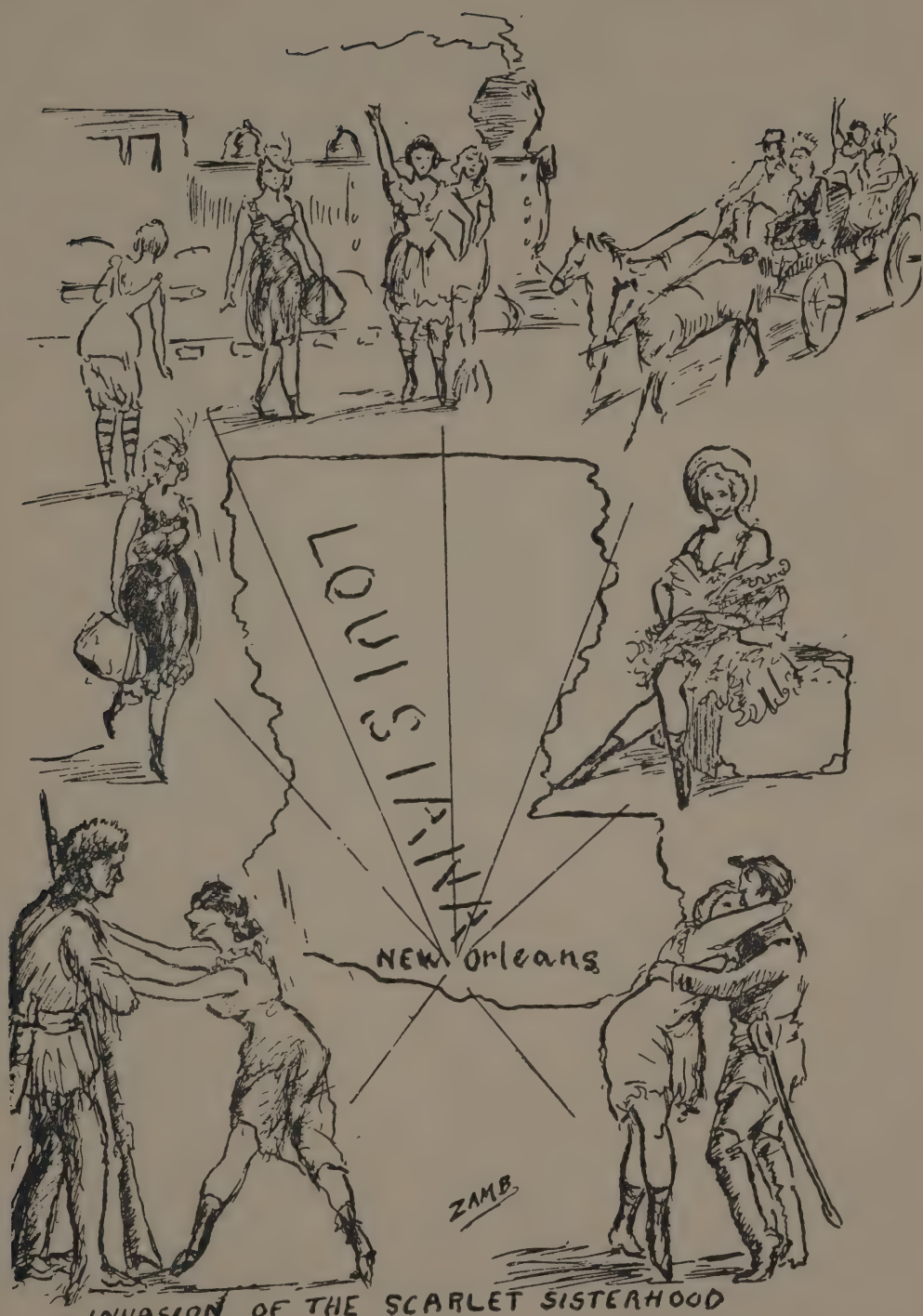
During the course of Basin Street's history it bore numerous names. It was first known to the City's upper crust as "Satan's Portion of the Dear Isle of Orleans." Second as "Back of Town". Third as "The Tenderloin District." Fourth, "The Red-light District." Fifth as "Storyville." To later generations it was known as "Ol' Basin Street."

The "Meat" of this story is found in the fourth name: "The Red-Light District." To the harlot the term did not mean or have anything in common with Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's definition of the term. Nor was the term used to advertise her business. It was strictly a signal between her and the policeman on the beat. This was her method of notifying him his pay was in the envelope waiting for him.

For what purpose was the money being paid, you ask. Well, there were several things a cop could do for harlot that duty did not require of him. Chief of which was to keep an extra eye on her place of business thereby affording added protection. To keep her front doorway clear of bums and beggars, be her friend in court, were but a few of the many ways a cop could render special service to the harlot. In a Basin Street mansion the red light was only burned on a Monday night. If the cop did not collect that night he would have to wait until the next Monday night. This, however, seldom happened. With the crib-house harlot this rule did not prevail. She burned a red light whenever she had the money.

It was the land-ladies of means that chose Monday night. For the simple reason that Saturday and Sunday nights were the two biggest nights in the week. It indeed was a poor harlot that did not have a bank roll come Monday night. Hence this night became the time the cop on the beat received his pay. Yes, this scribe has counted fifty-six red lights in one night. The significance of which was divided between the four cops that flat-footed the "District."





INVASION OF THE SCARLET SISTERHOOD



## THE MILDEST OF DRUGS

Perfume, to the prostitute has always played a vital part and is one of the chief tools of her trade. From the queenly figure of a Basin Street mansion harlot to the time worn "Broad" of Marais (Ma-ray) Street perfume was an is her principle asset.

Science says the so-called magic of perfume is on its way out. This, however, is not borne out by the sale of perfume. There is more perfume made and sold today than any other period of man's history. The use of scents is almost as old as man himself. For example the case of the Jewish woman, Esther.

Esther, before being received at the court of Ahasuerus was submitted to the ancient "Perfume cure" which by the way took more than a year to perform. The "Cure" was but insurance against her failing in her queenly duty. (See, Esther 2: 12). Yes, the erotic performance paid the harlot well. As most of the harlots clients come from but two fields, the lonesome and the suffering. The former is a gentleman, insofar as raiment and personal cleanliness is concerned. The latter from the field of hard labor. For these and other reasons the harlot uses perfume—the mildest of all drugs.







## General 'Siverspoon' Ben Butler

Union Military power in New Orleans. Whose tyrannical exploitation, encouragement of pillage and vice was viewed with Horror by the South led to his being recalled and superceded by General Banks



## THE NATCHEZ TRACE

From all directions and all walks of life women came to Basin Street. In the early history of the infamous thoroughfare a greater portion of its womenfolk came by the way of the Natchez Trace. This route remained popular until travel by steamboat was accepted by the public. The reason? Well, let's reminisce a bit.

The Natchez Trace (A beaten path) extended from the East Coast to Natchez, Mississippi. At this point the "Trace" crossed the Mississippi River extending southwest to San Antonio, Texas, and was called by the Texans, "The El Cantro."

From Nashville, Tennessee, one could travel over the "Trace" by stagecoach east to Washington, D. C., and points north. South and west of Nashville there was no such service, one used whatever means that was at hand. It was not until shortly after the ending of the Mexican War that Nashville had stagecoach service to the south. Then only as far as Vicksburg, Mississippi. It was not until the War Between the States had ended that the traveler could feel safe riding the "Trace" from Vicksburg to Port Gibson, Mississippi.

Throughout the ages prostitutes have always flocked to where soldiers were camped. As previously stated when the eastern harlot learned General Jackson was taking his army to New Orleans they immediately decided that was the place for them. Those afraid to travel by water took stage lines to Nashville, many of which arrived there on their last dime. Now, if there ever was a "Hustler" it's a harlot out of funds. They will have their way or die in the attempt.

Some of those who were completely out of funds decided to remain in Nashville and practice their profession until they had sufficient funds to purchase transportation to New Orleans. Others so anxious to be on their way gathered on the outskirts of Nashville and became America's first hitch-hikers.

Those who were foolish enough to cast their lot with an all-man outfit were indeed a sad group of women by the time they reached Port Gibson, Mississippi. Shortly after leaving Nashville some of these women began to see the hand writing upon the wall and deserted their protectors at the first settlement they reached, Yazoo City, Mississippi. At the time but a trading post operated by an Englishman named Manchester. Others bore the ill treatment of the men as far as Vicksburg, Mississippi. Those a bit harder of heart and flesh bore the brutally as far south as Port Gibson, Mississippi, by far the hardest community along the Natchez Trace upon the harlot.

Harlots traveling in a wilderness with a group of men they had never before seen under went ill treatment. This was most true of women who were so unfortunate as to be overtaken with the "Way of women." The men declared them useless and left them by the wayside. Either to be rescued by other travelers, taken by highwaymen, become some Indian's sqaw, or go stark mad from fear and hunger, and be torn apart by wild beasts. These were but a few of the chances a harlot took along the Natchez Trace. Although most humane to the destitute and ill. The law, at the time was vested in the community's Church (Presbyterian). To have the benefits offered by the Church to the harlot it was only necessary the harlot promise not to sin in the community's midst. For harlotry was the one thing Port Gibson would not tolerate.

Should the harlot violate her promise she would be forgiven for the first offence. The second time, however, the charge became adultery and if found guilty she was given nine lashes across the bare back with an eight plat whip. To emphasize what would happen to her if she returned a rope was placed around her neck and in full view of the populace whereupon she was led out of town and told to be on her way to New Orleans, America's Most Sinful City. So in short, dear reader, is a few of the hardships a harlot was forced to bare along the Natchez Trace as she made way to New Orleans.





AMB

The River made New Orleans  
and the River may someday  
Destroy her —



## SIDNEY STORY

If there ever was a good man's name ill used it was that of Alderman Sidney Story. In 1896 Sidney Story was elected City Alderman. The section of the city he represented included the French Quarter and the Red light District. Prior to his election Story had made a thorough study of large eastern cities' methods of handling the question of prostitution. In doing so he came to the conclusion the best way to meet this problem was by segregation.

Once in office he immediately set about to have his convictions made law. In October 1897 the "Law" went into action and the French Quarter harlots were moved to the section of the city shown on the map. Here they were sheltered by the law and given some protection from the police who forever stood with both hands out.

Green with envy, hearts overflowing with hatred for Alderman Story, merchants of the "Quarter" who missed the business the harlots fetched began calling the segregated section "Storyville", and Storyville it remained. Much to the disgust of Sidney Story.

THE END











A RAINY NIGHT ON  
OLD  
BASIN STREET

ZAMB









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